

Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program for 2004
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
In cooperation with University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Short Term Seminar Project
Thailand and Laos:
Highlighting Southeast Asian Heritage and Culture
in the K-12 Curriculum

Within the education community in the Midwestern U.S., this program wishes to help raise the visibility and importance of Southeast Asia. The school populations in these once-largely European-American cities and rural communities are growing increasingly diverse, with Southeast Asian children prominent among increasing numbers of Latin American, Eastern European, Pacific Island, and African immigrant and refugee children and children in multicultural families.

The richness of children's heritage language and culture is important for teachers not only to understand but also to integrate into the curriculum for *all* children. For that to happen, teachers need better teacher training programs and more professional development opportunities to experience the cultures of children from Southeast Asia.

This five-week summer opportunity will strengthen teacher training programs which are just beginning to offer certification for Wisconsin teachers to learn the Lao and Hmong languages. It will help teachers develop an appreciation of the crucial role of heritage languages in the acquisition of other academic skills and in helping children see themselves as persons with distinct, complex, and valued identities.

Not only immigrant and refugee children but *all* children in Wisconsin need to have more experiences with diverse global languages and cultures. The importance of Asia as an economic, cultural and historic place makes it imperative for students to know its geography, history, music, literature and modern-day peoples. The program will give a group of K-12 teachers and teacher-educators an opportunity to gather resources to enrich their teaching, including photographs, videos, books, impressions, and most importantly, professional and sister school contacts.

Weeks 1, 2, and 3 will introduce participants to Thailand, beginning with the capital city Bangkok, the historical wealth of the Sukhothai region, and then flowing almost immediately toward the diversity of hill tribe cultures around Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Udon Thani.

By Week 4, the group will have the opportunity to visit the Ministry of Education in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos and to investigate education and language policy, teacher training practices from a comparative perspective.

Finally, the group will return to Thailand to finish individual and small group projects. Culturally-based curriculum development for social studies, linguistically-based curriculum for heritage speakers, or university-level curriculum for heritage language teacher training programs will be three examples of units resulting from the travel, further developed and shared when the participants return to the U.S.

The group will meet twice during two different weekend seminars at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee before embarking on the seminar. Upon returning, they will meet once a month for four months to finalize the curriculum projects to enable them to share with colleagues in a printed monograph form, via created Internet pages, and with presentations at conferences and professional development workshops for colleagues.